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ABSTRACT

Traditional assessments in university courses led students to seek goals that current research reports as unacceptable since success had been based on knowledge acquisition rather than performance or ability to use this information in authentic situations. Assessment must require the performance of exemplary tasks. The purpose of this project was to design performance-based assessments to use with preservice teachers in literacy methods courses that would be patterned after the performance-event tasks required by the State of Kentucky as a result of the Kentucky Reform Act (1990). Descriptions of final examinations issued in three methods classes show this performance orientation: Teaching Reading and Language Arts in Elementary School; Teaching Reading and Language Arts in Middle School; and Reading Instruction in the Elementary School. Each of the exams required students to work through problems individually and in groups. One of the greatest hindrances during the assessment process seemed to be time management. Though students completed their tasks in time, they found themselves frustrated. Also dominant personalities in the groups seemed to do most of the work, while they sidelined less assertive students. However, recent groups with more experience with this form of assessment had less difficulty. Grading also presented certain difficulties. Certain quantitative methods of scoring fell short of the teacher's need to differentiate the quality of student responses. More work must be done in the development of rubrics for scoring. Overall, the response to this type of assessment was positive in that it strengthened student responses to course reading. (Appendixes contain Kentucky New Teacher Outcomes and sample grading rubrics.) (TB)

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Project Authentic Connections: Performance-Based Assessment in Reading/Language Arts Courses for Pre-Service Teachers

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Project Authentic Connections: Performance-Based Assessment in Reading/Language Arts Courses for Pre-Service Teachers

Introduction

The professional discussion of issues related to testing and assessment is an essential one that educators have begun to consider for the 21st century. In addition, educational reform has created a shift in the nation's definition of cognitive learning and has found teacher educators searching for a new perspective in assessment as well. Since the view of knowledge and reality as human construction, value-laden, and embedded within social context leads to a respect for diverse perspectives, it seems relevant to recognize that preservice teachers may enter educational courses with their own constructed realities in much the same manner as public school students may enter their classrooms with differing realities. Several research studies have been conducted to redefine evaluations used with students so as to gain a more in-depth look at cognitive growth through a more authentic process (Au, Scheu, Kawakami, & Herman, 1990; Wiggins, 1989; Winograd, Paris, & Bridge, 1991). But, the real issue of assessment choice would seem to lie in its desired relationship to the learning situation (Johnston, 1989; Martinez, et.al.,1989) for all types of learners.

Traditional assessments in university courses led students to seek goals which current research reports as unacceptable since success had been based on knowledge acquisition rather than performance or ability to use this information in authentic situations. In order for an assessment to enhance the instructional emphasis and produce evidence of knowing, it must require the performance of exemplary tasks (Wiggins, 1989). With these studies before us, the purpose of this project was to design performance-based assessments to use with preservice teachers in literacy methods courses that would be

patterned after the performance-event tasks required by the State of Kentucky as a result of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (1990). These authentic, cooperative tasks were to be developed to offer practice in the types of problem-solving and process production representative of future professional tasks. The specific goals for this project included: a) evaluation of the preservice teachers' understanding of the integration of the five language modes (reading, writing, speaking,listening, observing) in curriculum planning, b) observation of cooperative groups' abilities to work together to apply theory and instructional strategies, c) promotion of preservice teachers' creation of usable products with potential for their future classrooms, and d) encouragement of preservice teachers in the anticipated preparation of similar evaluations for their future students. The results became meaningful feedback for both preservice teachers and university teacher educators.

Earlier Assessment Efforts

The move from traditional to performance-based assessment tasks was a gradual one. That is, this transition took place over several years, and included a period of time that might best be called hybridization where assessment tasks include combinations of traditional and alternative assessments. However, it should be noted that none of the teacher educators involved in this project ever used strictly traditional methods--multiple choice, true/false, fill-in-the-blanks--for assessment. The performance-based items in the literacy courses almost exclusively focused on the use of Running Records (a type of miscue analysis) as a reading assessment tool. This took two different forms: 1) students would code a passage while listening to the teacher or an audiotape reading and, 2) the passage given to students was already coded. In both cases, students were to calculate the accuracy

percentage, error rate and self-correction rate. They were to then apply the information gained from the Running Record calculations and interpretations to suggest possible follow-up assessments, and design lessons to highlight strengths while addressing literacy concerns. Since much class time was devoted to the usefulness, administration and interpretation of this type of informal reading assessment, it was felt that one could not effectively assess the preservice students' ability to code and interpret a Running Record by a traditional objective-type test item. Although this type of process information on a midterm or final examination certainly fits the perception of performance-based assessment, it was not the direct intention during those earlier years.

Another earlier performance-based assessment task involved a scenario created with "pseudo questions". It asked students to imbed, in an application task, various pieces of information that had been discussed in class. Often students were requested to cast this information in a form other than an essay. Such scenarios or "pseudo questions" were one step away from traditional test items in that the recall item was framed in a school-based context. At this point, items were framed for application. However, grading was analyzed to ensure that the factual information was present in the response.

So, the shift for this project came about naturally as there was more of a focus on what students could actually do, and what the project participants wanted them to be able to accomplish as future teachers. But the most urgent impetus for this move, of course, was the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) and the seven new teacher outcomes which were established for preservice teachers (See Appendix A). At this point, it should be noted that there were four years between the passage of KERA (1990) and the publication of the New

Teacher Standards (1994). In an effort to better prepare preservice teachers in the various aspects of KERA, including performance assessment, practices for teacher educators needed to change as well.

Description of the Project

Based on the KERA academic expectations and the various types of assessment that would eventually be used in public schools in Kentucky, three courses using performance-based assessment were designed to address content for teaching reading/language arts as well as: a) responsible group membership, b) multicultural perspectives, and c) integration of knowledge. Also, it was important that such assessments be "authentic", in this case, mirroring the type of problem-solving in which the preservice teachers would engage as future teachers. The courses were: Teaching Reading and Language Arts in the Elementary School (two sections); Teaching Reading and Language Arts in the Middle School (one section); and Reading Instruction in the Elementary School (two sections) for a total of five classes with approximately 125 students. The average number of students in each class was twenty-five. Although this project refers to these courses, it should be noted that similar efforts were utilized in similar courses which included experimental field-based language arts courses. Within the project courses, students were required to complete cooperative group event tasks that incorporated the effective use of content and/or curriculum, diverse perspectives within the group setting, and application of academic knowledge in multiple settings. In addition, students were provided opportunities to perform in a portfolio-type writing sample on an individual basis.

Sample performance-based tasks used for final examination assessments in one section of the introductory literacy class for elementary/middle school included the following:

Part I--Cooperative Group Task: After listening to Virginia Hamilton's taped version of the African American folktale,"The People Could Fly", and following along on a copy of this story--1) in cooperative groups of four, design a thematic web of instructional practices that could be utilized in the folktale. This web should reflect a collaborative brainstorming of possible instructional activities. It may be structured by appropriate subtopics/themes related to the story, or by content areas. Overall, the web should reflect a model of integrated curriculum.

Part II--Individual Writing Tasks:

1. "The People Could Fly", complete with its translation at the end, is clearly an example of literature to address the need of multiple perspectives of historical events for diverse populations. a) Where would a folktale such as this fit in your curriculum? b) Briefly explain how you might deal with the controversial issues it raises. c) Name at least one other book/story you would use to address similar needs.

2. Using the lesson plan format found in your course manual, select two activities from your web and develop lesson plans for them. One lesson must address an integrated language arts perspective, and the other must describe a content area lesson linked to a story.

Another sample performance-based task for final examination in one other introductory literacy course included this two-part type assessment:

Part I--Cooperative Group Task:

Using the materials provided, (straws, glue, cotton balls, poster board, scissors, colored construction paper, colored markers, paper cups, etc.) develop a two- or three- dimensional representation of the various components of the Kentucky Educational Reform Act as they relate to constructivist reform and language arts instruction. Include all aspects of the reform goals,

academic expectations, multiple intelligences and cultural diversity. Be prepared to provide a group explanation for a videotape production at the conclusion of the allotted time.

Part II--Individual Portfolio Writing Tasks:

1. You have read several articles and participated in many classroom group simulations that contained suggestions/ideas for organizing language arts instruction. Now you are ready to design your own organizational-instruction pattern. Choose a grade level (primary vs. intermediate) and describe the components of a reading curriculum you would implement which includes effective instruction for all students. Be sure to provide a rationale for the use of multiple materials (e.g. basals, trade books, literature that is culturally diverse, recordings, games, computers).

2. As a first year classroom teacher, write a letter that you might send to the director of curriculum in your school district. The letter should explain why you have decided to design a reading program in your classroom that ensures continuing development of students' attitudes and interests. Include your viewpoint of multiple intelligences and cultural diversity as they relate; use research information to support and emphasize your philosophical stance.

This next assessment was used as a final examination assessment in the one section of the reading instruction class for elementary students that was taken during the students practicum--usually one semester before student teaching and following the completion of the introductory literacy course:

Part I--Cooperative Group Task:

Each group member will transcribe a Running Record based on a narrative reading. After the reading, the cooperative group must: a) come to a consensus regarding the interpretations of the Running Record coding; b)

calculate the accuracy percentage, error rate, and self-correction rate; and c) complete an error analysis sheet to accompany the running record. Finally, the group should make a diagnosis for instruction based on the information obtained in the running record.

Part II--Individual Writing Tasks:

Considering the Running Record analyses completed in your group, respond to the following questions:

1. You are the teacher of the 8 year old primary student on which the Running Record was taken. The student is new to your school and classroom, and his cumulative folder has not yet arrived from the previous school. Since you want to get started on instruction that will be developmentally appropriate for this child and help him become a strategic reader, you do not want to wait any longer for the folder. Given the information you have gathered already, what else do you want to know about this child relative to literacy? On the attached grid, make a list for yourself of questions you want answered.
2. Now that you have made a list of questions, you need to decide on appropriate assessment procedures that will answer these questions. You also need to note why you would choose each procedure so that you might defend your decisions to other teachers, your principal, or the child's parents. Complete the grid you began in Question 1 by filling in columns 2 and 3.

For each of the before mentioned performance assessment tasks, a grading rubric was designed to establish criteria for evaluation of both group and individual efforts for these outcome based assessments (See Appendix B). These assessment tools were intended to mirror the theories and strategies which had been discussed and utilized in the courses throughout the semester. Within the group tasks, the cooperative component added the social, and problem-solving elements required to work successfully in a public school

teaching-team. In addition, it provided opportunities for preservice teachers to learn first-hand the merits of valuing and celebrating differences. The individual tasks were designed to assure independent responses to the materials gleaned through the group effort and potential for synthesizing theory into personal teaching philosophies or previously constructed realities that were brought into these course settings. This balance between cooperative and independent learning was developed with the assumption of increasing the effectiveness for the development of performance-based assessment instruments both for instructor evaluations and university students' self reflections.

Project Results

One of the greatest hinderances during the assessment process seemed to be time management which became the responsibility of the students. Through negotiation and self-monitoring, the groups were expected to complete all tasks within the framework and alloted time of the examination period. This, too, mirrored the types of time constraints which often confounds novice teachers. But the outcome of such expectations proved frustrating for the university students. When the performance-based assessment instruments were first used, these assessment changes were new and unfamiliar. Even though the class had discussed and applied these alternative types of evaluations, the preservice teachers found the performance events overwhelming at first. This was also demonstrated in videotaped final examination assessments when status issues within the cooperative groups became evident as perceived high status students expected to be more competent and were expected to be more competent by others. The net effect seemed to be a self-fulfilling prophecy whereby those who were seen as having more ability tended to dominate those who were seen as having less ability. Since interaction was vital to productivity,

many group members felt unproductive and voiced their concerns to the teacher educators. It was obvious that facing this new type of accountability was not easy for them, and the empathy they developed for the possible status of future students became an important by-product of the evaluation process.

However, it is important to note that the most recent group to have used such assessment instruments appeared to have a greater background knowledge, more exposure to assessment for learning, and a higher degree of comfort with "process" itself. With the delegation of authority to the preservice teachers by the teacher educators modeled throughout the semester, more lateral communication took place among the students during the actual performance-based event tasks were practiced by the students. As a result, it appears that the performance event was less stressful and the products showed thoughtful and reflective responses.

Reflections and Recommendations

The move to performance-based assessment presented these teacher educators with an authentic dilemma--grading. Of particular concern was the manner in which to indicate best to students those elements considered essential in a given performance event. Their comfort and confidence in developing such scoring rubrics was not commensurate with the design of the performance events themselves. Initially, scoring rubrics were mainly scoring sheets that delineated possible point values for the various parts of a multifaceted assessment. While helpful to students in determining the sources for their total point value on the assessment, these rubrics fell short in helping the teacher educators differentiate quality of responses; presence or absence of information was the basis of such scoring sheets.

The next phase of scoring rubrics attempted to rectify the above shortcomings in quantifiable terms. For example, in order to receive full

point value, students had to include five of the seven multiple intelligences in their web. The inclusion of quantifiable terms in these rubrics provided greater quantities of information on which to evaluate the assessment task, but responses still fell short conceptually. This finding led to the creation of conceptual rubrics, delineating for students the types of processing and conceptual links necessary to complete the task with the greatest success.

These educators see the need for continued improvement in the area of rubrics. Full points on a scoring rubric should be synonymous with course academic expectations. Such expectations are conceptual rather than quantifiable listings. Lesser point values represent intermediate or lesser expectations. Following this line of thought, these educators hope to move from designing rubrics for particular performance assessment tasks. Instead, such rubrics would be designed first and serve as the undergirding elements for the course.

An additional reflection targets the tensions between theory and practice. Accusations are often launched at universities on this issue. In the case of performance-based assessment in Kentucky, there is the additional ingredient of political tensions. Many incoming lawmakers disagree with their predecessors who were involved in the passage of KERA (1990) and its subsequent implementation guidelines. If the nature of assessment in public schools changes, as new lawmakers intimate, these educators fear that university coursework and public school realities will once again be incongruent. Such incongruence poses a dilemma once again. These educators, through experience, have come to believe in performance assessment.

Overall benefits of this type of assessment mechanism were noted in the richness of response, which seem to be increased through the social construction of ideas. Brainstorming appeared to increase the number of

worthwhile ideas and strengthen student reactions to the course readings. The integrated language modes and the reading/writing connections exhibited throughout the performance-based assessment process confirmed heighten usage awareness for the preservice teachers. Indications of this project are that within the process of performance events, quality and depth of response can increase; in turn, this type of assessment could effectively increase the quality of college assessments for preservice teachers enrolled in teacher preparation programs. For the reform-minded educator in teacher preparation programs, greater concern can be shown for the ability to demonstrate and apply that which is learned. Involvement in the processes to be used for, and with, future preservice teachers increases the empathy of those learners strengths, needs and concerns for effective instruction in a complex and diverse world where all children can achieve at high levels. Finally, it appears that performance-based assessment can be used successfully to bridge the gap from theory to practice. This project represents a continuing effort toward that goal for teacher educators of literacy learning.

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Appendix A

New Teacher Outcomes

Kentucky Education Professional Standards Board,

Kentucky Department of Education (1994)

Outcome I:

The teacher designs/plans instruction and learning climates that develop student abilities to use communication skills, apply core concepts, become self-sufficient individuals, become responsible team members, think and solve problems, and integrate knowledge.

Outcome II:

The teacher creates a learning climate that supports the development of student abilities. . .

Outcome III:

The teacher introduces/implements/manages instruction that develops student abilities. . .

Outcome IV:

The teacher assesses learning and communicates results to students and others.

Outcome V:

The teacher reflects on and evaluates specific teaching/learning situations and/or programs.

Outcome VI:

The teacher collaborates with colleagues, parents, and other agencies to design, implement, and support learning programs.

Outcome VII:

The teacher evaluates his/her overall performance with respect to modeling and teaching and implements a professional development plan.

Appendix B

Sample Grading Rubrics for Performance-Based Assessment Tasks

Criteria for Cooperative Group Tasks

"The People Could Fly"

50 pts. =
1. Web represents a high degree of integration across curricular areas
2. Web represents a high degree of integration of the language arts areas
3. Web addresses at least 5 of the 7 multiple intelligences
4. Activities suggested in the web are congruent with KERA guidelines particularly as they relate to authentic, performance-based tasks

40 pts. =
1. Web represents a moderate degree of integration across curricular areas
2. Web represents a moderate degree of integration of the language arts areas
3. Web addresses at least 4 of the 7 multiple intelligences
4. Web reflects an awareness of KERA guidelines,but few activities involve authentic, performance-based tasks

30 pts. =
1. Web represents little integration across curricular areas
2. Web represents little integration of the language arts areas
3. Web addresses 3 or fewer of the 7 multiple intelligences
4. Web reflects little awareness of KERA guidelines since activities are not authentic, performance-based tasks

"Two- or Three- Dimensional Theoretical Model"

40 pts. =
1. Demonstrates a logical, well-organized theoretical model
2. Identifies/defines integrated language arts experiences
3. Provides for alternative strategies to meet diverse student needs in an effective manner
4. Is able to show evidence of each particular L.A. concept
5. Is congruent with the intent of KERA and demonstrates this within the model

30 pts. =
1. Demonstrates a logical theoretical model
2. Identifies/defines integrated language arts experiences
3. Provides for alternative strategies to meet diverse student needs
4. Is able to show evidence of some language arts concepts
5. Seems aware of the intent of KERA but need further development in demonstrating this in the model

20 pts. =
1. Developed an appropriate model
2. Little or not attention given to integrated language arts experiences
3. Little or no attention given to alternative strategies for diverse student needs
4. Unable to demonstrate language arts concepts
5. Unable to demonstrate the intent of KERA

Less than 20 pts is an unacceptable model and will result in a retake of this portion of the examination in a different format

Sample Grading Rubrics for Performance-Based Assessment Tasks (cont'd.)

Criteria for Individual Lesson Plan Tasks:

Each lesson plan must include:

1. Objective(s): What, exactly, the students will do, under what conditions. (Example: After listening to a tape of the story, the students will, in cooperative groups, create a Readers Theater script from the printed version, then perform it for the class).
2. Materials: List all the materials the lesson will require, both for you and the students.
3. Procedure: List all the steps of the lesson, from the initiation/ introduction through closure. This may be a simple list; sentences are not required.
4. Evaluation: Explain briefly how you will determine whether the lesson was successful.

Criteria for Running Record Evaluation:

30 pts. =
1. Running record represents extremely accurate coding of the passage (two or fewer text deviations ignored)
2. Calculations for accuracy percentage, error rate, and self-correction rate are extremely accurate
3. Error analysis sheet reflects a thorough and thoughtful analysis of deviations from the text

20 pts. =
1. Running record represents moderately accurate coding of the passage (five or fewer text deviations ignored)
2. Calculations for accuracy percentage, error rate, and self-correction rate are close to the target
3. Error analysis sheet reflects moderately accurate analysis of deviations from the text

10 pts. =
1. Running record represents coding of less accuracy (six or more text deviations ignored)
2. Calculations for accuracy percentage, error rate and self-correction rate deviate significantly from the target
3. Error analysis sheet reflects often inaccurate analysis of deviations from the text

Criteria for Individual Portfolio Writing Task:

20 pts. =
1. Questions posed are tied closely to the RR results
2. Questions reflect keen attention to cognitive as well as affective characteristics of the reading process
3. Questions are tied to KERA guidelines as they relate to goals for language arts and communication

10 pts. =
1. Questions posed will do little to supplement the information already gathered by the RR results
2. Questions focus on only cognitive or only affective characteristics of the reading process, therefore presenting only part of the picture
3. Questions reflect little attention to KERA guidelines for language arts and communication